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### Review Of "Crafting Identity In Zimbabwe And Mozambique" By E. MacGonagle

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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Crafting Identity in Zimbabwe and Mozambique* by Elizabeth MacGonagle

Review by: Timothy Burke

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heritage of Berber is turned to embrace Morocco's cultural and ethnic diversity. Male artists have appropriated indigenous Berber art forms and motifs intimately connected to women in their desire to express their postcolonial Moroccan identity, a national identity that is increasingly tolerant of its Berber population. These painters pay tribute to the artistic legacy of Berber women. Tifinagh script reappears in contemporary women's textile and tattoo motifs. Not only painters, but also poets and writers are now turning to Berber visual and performing art forms for inspiration. The association between women, art, and Berber identity is being recognized everyday. Women are valorized as keepers of the Berber culture and the construction of the primacy of the Berber language in the construction of Berber identity. Berber bridal attire has little changed.

All in all, this is a most needed work in Berber studies in general, and gender and women's studies in particular. The perspective of this book fills a significant gap in the literature.

FATIMA SADIQI

*University of Fes, Morocco*

***Crafting Identity in Zimbabwe and Mozambique.* By Elizabeth MacGonagle.**

Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press. 2007. Pp. 192. \$75.00 / £45.00.

A historiographical consensus about the "invention of tradition" and the construction of ethnicity during colonial rule in southern Africa has been slowly eroded in the last decade of scholarly writing. That earlier argument was partly a straightforward factual corrective to representations of ethnic or tribal identity in Africa as being fixed and unchanging, partly a direct attack on the ideological underpinnings of apartheid, and partly an attempt to explain and account for the role of ethnic mobilization in postcolonial political struggle throughout Africa.

Important as all of those priorities were, the model created some serious issues. For one, it buttressed the dangerous view of at least some nationalist regimes that subnational identities were the instrumental creation of colonial rule, and could and should be suppressed by some of the same authoritarian devices that had supposedly brought them into being. For another, the concept of invented traditions has tended to give Africanist historians an overly facile and exaggeratedly instrumental understanding of the production of memory and identity. Perhaps most importantly, a strong assumption about the close relationship between colonial rule and "tribal" identity has tended to sharply foreground historical interest in these identities into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and to discourage claims that these identities have deeper roots whose expression in the colonial era was as much driven by African agency as imperial policy.

Elizabeth MacGonagle's new book on the history of the Ndaue people of eastern Zimbabwe and central Mozambique is a powerful example of the scholarship that is undercutting that earlier consensus. From the outset of the book, in a remarkably lucid introductory chapter, MacGonagle argues that contemporary Ndaue identity is not primarily a consequence of recent processes of colonial and postcolonial invention, but instead derives significantly from social and political processes that precede modern colonial

control of the region. Colonialism, she agrees, “manipulated” Ndaou and comparable identities, but it did not invent or create them.

MacGonagle’s methodological strategy for describing Ndaou identity in the *longue duree* is deliberately inclusive, and could well serve as a straightforward guide for other historians striving to study precolonial African history. Rather than trying to build extravagant claims more or less exclusively from one type of evidence (archaeological, linguistic, testimonial, or written), she makes pragmatic use of every type of evidence and source to compose more straightforward narrative and descriptive accounts of Ndaou history. In many ways, this is an old mode of writing ethnohistory, and I sincerely mean that as a compliment. MacGonagle’s account builds slowly and methodically towards its more far-reaching claims while remaining deeply useful even for those who may not accept its general argument.

Given the book’s conceptual ambitions, MacGonagle does not spend enough time thinking through the problems and complexities of identity as a concept. She largely treats identity as an externalized expression of political and social organization, visible largely in practices of everyday life and in visible performances of group membership. There’s a different set of basically phenomenological questions about how much ethnicity informs intersubjective and psychological experience, of whether there is a distinctively Ndaou or Zulu or Tswana consciousness. These are not merely academic questions, either: the question of whether (or why) people act in the world as Ndaou or Zulu or Tswana turns on both the social and psychological aspects of identity. No matter what the methodology, *mentalité* in the deeper precolonial past is remarkably hard to study and describe, but the question of consciousness and personal experience of identity probably could have used more discussion in this excellent, useful book.

TIMOTHY BURKE

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***A Failed Eldorado: Colonial Capitalism, Rural Industrialization, African Land Rights in Kenya, and the Kakamega Gold Rush, 1930–1952.*** By Priscilla Shilaro. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008. Pp. 270. \$39.00 paper.

Priscilla Shilaro’s *A Failed Eldorado* is an exceptionally well-researched monograph about a little-known moment in colonial Kenyan history: the Kakamega gold rush of 1932, an event that had an enormous impact on the Luhya people of Kakamega. Shilaro’s study is painstakingly empirical, and traces a variety of legal and social-economic issues surrounding the rise of extractive capitalism in Kakamega. Shilaro argues that, from the perspective of white settlers, successful gold extraction in the 1930s temporarily succeeded in making up for their losses in other arenas such as agriculture, but that, over the long term, mining proved unsustainable, partly because of its capital intensive nature, Kenya’s dependence on foreign imports, and global market fluctuations. Shilaro’s study focuses on how the gold rush adversely affected Luhya people in Kakamega, and she impressively documents the devastating impact of land alienation, prostitution, and health problems